

Table Talk

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Table Talk

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg
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Who knows where the time goes?

by Jeff Odgren

It was the time of morning when even the smallest pebble cast a shadow. I was on my 479th round-trip between North Hall and the hallowed halls of Valentine. The robins were back and singing, along with all the other birds who never left. It was music to my ears - well, except for a young crow sitting on top of the cupola on Old Dorm, emitting a sound only young crows can emit, and which only its mother (and father?) could love.

The squirrels were cavorting in the trees, occasionally hitting the ground and doing the "Gettysburg Shuffle" across West Confederate Avenue. And Martin Luther was still sitting down.

I was waxing nostalgic on this sunny Spring morning, thinking to myself that my days are numbered at this place on the famous ridge. It's a beautiful place - historic, naturally picturesque, offering dramatic sunrises and sunsets, along with a view of gathering storm clouds.

I realized that there would be only a few more weeks of walking Emily to day care and being part of probably the largest group of Dads and a Mom to wait with their kids at the bus stop anywhere in the Gettysburg Area School District.

It's not like this place was ever destined to be home for very long. But we've called it home for four years, and now it's almost time to leave it. Closure is not something I've ever been very good at, but I need to share a bit of what I take with me to wherever I'm going, as a way of "closing the book", so to speak.

I don't dare take up all the space needed to truly do justice to this experience, but here are some of my memories and musings:

"B. E. M.":

not some new line of athletic wear, but a document to be studied during pre-session in September of 1991; our official introduction to the search for common ground.

"Yes":

a rock group who was really big back in the 70's; also the answer given when presented with an option in the answering of a theological question; indicative either of a heightened sense of dialectic or a penchant for keeping people in the dark.

"Dialectic":

life in general. Can be applied in the discussion of ethics, pastoral care, Lutheran theology, and many other places; refers to an awareness that little of life is cut and dry. A healthy way to look at life, but it takes practice.

"There was a time when he was not...":

No there wasn't. Refer to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, or John 1 to start.

"Greek":

something which we ate, slept, and drank for a month; not always a friend, sometimes an enemy (at least during January). In the end, a window flung open on the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ.

"feet":

fairly mundane parts of our anatomy which will never have quite the same connotation as they did before seminary.

I remember the autobiographies, the interviews, endorsement, approval. There were fears - some realized, some unwarranted. CPE and internship exposed gifts and growing edges.

There were papers, projects, a funeral practicum, exegesis and proclamation, worship, teaching, singing, consoling, late nights in the library, pertinent and helpful discussions with classmates and professors, golf and cigars and Rolling Rock, spaghetti and meat balls and green salads, crab feasts, accordion playing, Distelfink, warm summer nights with no mosquitos, horses walking through our yard, schedules which gave new

meaning to "burning the candle at both ends", and a slow realization that I would never be able to get all the reading done and still have a wife and kids who wouldn't be forgetting who I was. One of the biggest highlights has been watching the children grow up before our eyes.

There were moments when I wondered what I was doing here because it just seemed so difficult. Periodically I'd wish that I could see a large near sign or hear a voice from heaven saying "Yes, Jeff, you ARE called!" Always discernment, always a leap of faith.

There most certainly has been growth, and that will not end here. If there ever was a time when I thought I would receive the methodology to grant clear-cut answers to life's persistent questions, it has long since slipped into oblivion, never to be recovered. And that's OK, because what I've received in its place is much more valuable.

The only clear-cut answer I take from here is that faith is what matters. Faith in the One who has called us here, and faith in the One who will not abandon us when we go out and witness to that which gives us imperishable hope - a crucified and risen Christ.

Perhaps the most vivid image I take from here is the one indelibly etched in my brain after taking my wife to work at the Gettysburg Hospital one morning. The whole seminary was fogged in. But as soon as we got down into town, the fog broke up and the sun was shining. I didn't give it much thought until I had dropped Ann off and started home.

As I rounded the corner at Long Lane and West Street, I happened to look back up toward the Seminary. The whole ridge was still enveloped in that thick fog. Nothing was visible - not a tree, not even the outline of a house - nothing except the top half of the steeple on the Church of the Abiding Presence. There, shining in the brilliance of an early morning sun was the steeple and the cross on top. I was wishing I had my camera. It was a magnificent sight.

A picture which had suffering and victory written all over it.

JEFF ODGREN is a fourth year student from New England Synod

A Plea for Diversity

by JoAnn M. Darrow

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven. (Matthew 5:14ff.)

In my three years on this campus, I have often been struck by the fact that Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg is indeed "a city built on a hill", both literally and figuratively. As one is driving west on Route 30, one cannot help but be struck by the grandeur of the buildings when one looks up from the foot of the hill. But lately, even as I have reflected on the physical grandeur, I have begun to question the light that is emanating from our community.

As one of the few remaining United Methodist students at this seminary, I have vigorously defended it since the decision by our University Senate to revoke its approval of this site for the preparation of United Methodist clergy nearly two years ago. However, in reviewing the composition of the student body and the faculty hiring patterns of the seminary during my time here, I am distressed to find that I can no longer support my own position.

Two of the reasons that the University Senate stated for its decision were the lack of diversity among the student body and the lack of diversity, including adequate representation by women and people of color, among the faculty. I find these two concerns to be inextricably linked. It is unlikely that the seminary will ever attract a diverse student body when there is no apparent desire to diversify the faculty.

Women comprise nearly 50% of the student body here. However, as Dr. Gench reminded us during Chapel on April 19, five years ago there were four women and one African-American on the faculty. Now, five years later, there are still four women and one African-American on the faculty. While I affirm the seminary's desire to remain a distinctly Lutheran institution, I cannot believe that this cannot be achieved while simultaneously increasing the presence of women and people of color. Since the hiring of Dr. Hedahl, the President has recommended and the Board of Directors has approved the hiring of five white male professors, including the new professor for the Church in Society position.

The 1994-95 Catalog contains the following passage under the heading "Inclusive Language":

Language reflects, reinforces and creates social reality. Mindful of our unity in Christ, the seminary expects that all discourse, written and oral, will honor the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. (p. 29)

However, in reviewing the most recent faculty additions, it becomes apparent that the affirmation of inclusive language does not currently extend to actual inclusivity. It is troubling that we seem more concerned with how we speak about God than about whether we dialogue with our brothers and sisters from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. While I affirm the gifts and abilities of all the faculty, including the recent additions, it is difficult to believe that none of these positions could have been filled by either women or people of color who, by virtue of their own unique life experiences, would bring a fresh perspective and voice to this community.

It is imperative that faculty members who are hired complement rather than duplicate talents, perspectives and abilities that are already present. The apostle Paul writes:

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many . . . If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But

as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? (1 Corinthians 12:14, 17-19)

My fear is that without diversity in our community, we may not have "eyes" to see or "ears" to hear and understand those individuals and groups who are different from us.

The Social Statement of the ELCA entitled "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture" states:

The Christ to whom the Church witnesses is the Christ who breaks down walls of cultural exclusivity (Mark 7:24-29; John 4). We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have recognized ourselves to be in mission and ministry in a multicultural society, and have committed ourselves to welcome cultural diversity . . . The commitment was made, though, in these and other ways: . . . - the attention to inclusivity by seminaries, colleges, and social ministry organizations of the church . . . (p. 2)

A seminary or other educational institution that does not model inclusivity cannot hope to attract an inclusive student body. Also, as part of the body of Christ, this seminary must model, and prepare prospective church leaders to model, fairness, inclusiveness and understanding.

I discouraged that, rather than striving for gender, ethnic and cultural inclusivity on this campus, this seminary requires a one month "multi-cultural experience" of its students. As long as diversity remains something to be "experienced" as outside of our daily lives, we cannot hope to promote healing and justice in a broken and unjust world. Understanding and acceptance are not possible if one is not consistently exposed to diverse people and viewpoints. That which is unknown will continue to be perceived as threatening.

The Social Statement goes on to assert:

Because of sin and indifference, intentional measures are necessary for vision to become reality. We expect our leadership to clarify why measures were taken, and to help members deal with the implications of such measures. (p. 5)

I affirm this stated position of the ELCA, particularly as it parallels the position of the United Methodist Church and I hope that you, as members of the student body, will encourage the administration and faculty of this seminary to actively seek diversity at all levels of seminary life. Only then will we be effectively prepared to minister to all people in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Then we will truly be a light to the world and bring glory to our God in heaven.

Several of us who are leaving this seminary due to graduation or internship have worked to bring this issue to the attention of the faculty and the Board over the last few months and we will continue to watch for signs of progress even after we are gone. As students at this seminary, I implore you to speak out on this situation. We must keep this concern before the administration and the faculty at all times. We must be in conversation with the Board of Directors about our vision for this institution. Please let your voice be heard. Let us prepare to be leaders of the church in a hostile and hurting world by leading this seminary to be a model as it prepares people for ministry. My prayers will be with you.

Eden Reframed: Eve's Plea

by Louise L. Reynolds

My Father, Creator,
Mother divine,
look thou with love
upon doings of mine.

Let me be
your playing child.
Let your displeasure
in me be mild,
And when I stray,
call me to stay.
Never, never
send me away.

Look on me,
and realize
that you are all things
in my eyes.

You are the apple,
you are the tree.
You are the savor
the fruit gives to me.

10

I am not you.
I am other.
I am of you.
You are mother.

Yet, in my birthing,
something tore,
and I am broken we.

Forgive me.

An Invitation to Prayer

by Steve Amundson

Jesus' disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast out the demon?" He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer." --Mark 9

Gettysburg Seminary has completed its search for a new professor of Church in Society, and has again demonstrated the difficulty of doing justice. Despite the changing face of the ministry, the complexion of the faculty has not changed in five years. Nine times in the last five years, this seminary has hired new faculty; we have hired no minorities and only two women. One of these women was hired only as a result of a targeted search — we bound ourselves not to consider any male candidates.

As disturbing as the suggestion is, it appears this institution cannot hire women without forcing itself to; and yet we are reluctant to conduct targeted searches. As a result, the diversity of our faculty has progressed in five years from four women and one person of color -- to four women and one person of color. Arguments have arisen about why the face of the faculty is not changing. The stark fact remains that it is not changing. In the most recent call process, many students and faculty courageously called for diversity. Next year Gettysburg Seminary will not be more diverse. With great sorrow and reluctance, we must testify that this institution is held captive by the demons of sexism and racism. Our hiring practices reflect the ancient strength of these demons, who would have us believe that we simply cannot hire women and minorities. Although we are commissioned to cast out demons, we sometimes cannot. Some demons will come out only with prayer.

For this reason, I invite all members of the Gettysburg community to join me each Wednesday after the Eucharist in the meditation chapel to fast and pray for change. If you agree that the faculty should be as diverse as the people God calls into ministry, if you feel that this institution must change to reflect the justice of the Kingdom of God, then let us pray for diversity. Perhaps for mortals it is impossible; but for God all things are possible.

STEVEN AMUNDSON is a fourth year student from the Metro Washington, D.C. Synod

A View from the Midwest

by Keith Deckinger

I have learned much about myself since I arrived at Seminary almost two years ago. First, I learned that I am sexist when I call God "He". Even though I may appear uneducated by doing so, God has always been "He" to me. I was raised with a liturgy that always used "He" in reference to God. Even the translation of the Bible I had in my early years used "He". I am hurt when called sexist even though I strive to keep an open mind and an open heart. I do not desire to enter into this debate, but rather I mention this because it seems to be THE issue that gets all the press on this campus. I write this to point out that other issues besides the gender issue are present in this community, and these other issues alienate and denigrate others as well. What are these issues? Let me point out a few.

The issue that has always grated on my nerves and still to this day makes me wonder if any of our community has been outside the state of Pennsylvania is an issue of geographic misconception. Nebraska is my birth state. I know Nebraska is pretty much a flat state compared to the East Coast, and, yeah, we don't have as many trees, but these are not reasons for not wanting to go there for a first call or an internship. Nebraska is a state that has a population that is just as willing (and I think sometimes is more willing than out here) to hear the Gospel. The good people of Nebraska will also pay your salary if you come out to preach there. Maybe I like the plains so much because you can still breathe the air without wondering about air pollution (I know not every place in the East has pollution problems, but still there are many places that do). Oh, and to eliminate another misconception about the plains, we do have things to do out there. We even have towns and movie theaters and grocery stores and gas stations, and in most places we even have indoor plumbing. It pains me when I hear the area of the country that I grew up in joked about and degraded (I jest about the plains sometimes; my light-hearted joking stems from twenty-five years of living there, not out of fear of a place I have never been). Oh, one other thing: if you want to see REAL mountains, go see the Rockies!

Last month, my friend and classmate Michelle Nickodemus did a fine job

of addressing another issue, that of how we talk about age. Unfortunately, I fear most of our older schoolmate's paid much attention to it. Michelle pointed out that those of us in our twenties' have opinions that are just as valid as our classmates who are Old. Yes, I used the word Old; let me tell you why I used that word. I know I am only twenty-five years of age. I haven't been alive as long as some of my classmates. But anyone that is more advanced in age is older than I am. If you happen to be in your forties or fifties, you are within the age range of my parents. That makes you not only Old, but renders your knowledge suspect. I have been told many times that teenagers and those just coming out of their teenage years know everything. Do you enjoy having your opinion discounted simply because you are of a different age than I am? I hope you do not enjoy such blatant discrimination and denigrations. Age is a fact of life, and within any society there are those who are by birth date older than others. I do not discount the opinions of others on this campus simply because they are by birth date older, or younger, than I am. Comments such as, "Well, you're young, I've . . . (fill in the blank with how much more knowledge the speaker has because of age) . . ." As a very wise business professor once told me, "It doesn't matter if someone has twenty years of experience in a job, if they are doing the job wrong they have had twenty years to perfect their mistake." Experience is nice, but it doesn't always make a person right.

The final issue I feel needs to be addressed is that of community. We are a community of God. Within this community we need to keep an open mind. We also need to make certain that we do not get so caught up in our own issues that we fail to see that what we say, and even what we do not say, hurts others as much as our issues hurt us. This does not mean that we cannot have our opinions, but it does mean that we cannot discount the opinions of others. I struggle with some of these issues every day. I know I hold biases and do not even always keep an open mind myself. I do pray to God every day for help and guidance.

KEITH DECKINGER is a second year student from the Nebraska Synod

The Beauty in Change

by Nissa Swanson

You feel the rain begin to fall
And the walls of your heart grow tight
Life seems so self-defeating
You wonder how you can survive
When a well-meaning friend offers the advice
That surely there's beauty in change

Broken hearts and hopeless dreams
Where is there beauty in these?
Daily temptations and trials to face
Another tear in your heart and with tears in your eyes
You hear a shaking voice ask:
Where is there beauty in these?

chorus:

The beauty in change
Is that we do not change alone
But beneath God's watchful eyes
The seasons of time signal growth
And through change
God gives to each
The grace with which to grow wings

Trying so hard to find
An encouraging voice in the storm
the winds of change and the falling rain
Can be lonely unwelcome friends]
But your cries of despair do not go unheard
By the God who puts beauty in change

And after trying so hard
There will come a graceful saving time
A time when you realize that you've done
All you can do on your own
And being still in the presence of God
Seized by God's gift of grace
You'll be touched by the beauty in change

chorus:

The beauty in change
Is that we do not change alone
But beneath God's watchful eyes
The seasons of time signal growth
And through change
God gives to each
The grace with which to grow wings

And being seized by God's gift of grace
Touched by the beauty in change
You'll be freed . . . and given wings

Augury

May 7 - 13

10 Lutherans and American Christianity
Mr. Frederick K. Wentz
History of Christianity in America
(LLR, 2:00 p.m.)

12 & 13

Preaching & Music Workshop
Music, Gettysburg!

May 14 - 20

19 Last day of classes
3 p.m. - Commencement,
Chapel of the Abiding Presence